

Skyridge Church of the Brethren
Child Protection Policy

Initiated January 2001

Revised January 2003

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THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION

God embraces all children with love, placing their nurture and care in our hands. We believe that children should be safe from all forms of abuse and neglect. The congregation of the Skyridge Church of the Brethren is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in the ministries and the activities that we sponsor. Our guidelines and policy statements reflect our commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a community in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

Our tradition and scripture call us to welcome and protect children. When we bless infants and children, we, the congregation, promise to assist parents as they help their children grow in faith and in knowledge of God's presence in their lives. We fulfill this promise through the programs of the church and through personal contact as teachers, mentors and friends to both children and their parents. Scriptures that inform us in our relationship with children include the following:

Exodus 22: 21-24a – “And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him or her, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict them at all, and if they do cry out to me, I will surely hear their cries.”

Matthew 19: 14 – “But Jesus said, ‘Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

Luke 9: 46-48 – “And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest. But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their hearts, took a child and stood the child by his side, and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me receives God who sent me; for the one who is least among you, this is the one who is great.’”

Skyridge Church of the Brethren is a safe place for children. Teaching God's love through example is our highest priority.

1) ELIGIBILITY FOR CHILDCARE GIVERS

- a) Applicants who have been convicted of, or pled guilty to, physical or sexual abuse, or with allegations against them currently under investigation, will not be considered for either paid or volunteer work within the congregation.
- b) Volunteer childcare worker and substitutes for children's and youth Sunday School classes must be regular attendees for at least six months. Children's and youth Sunday

School teachers must be members for at least six months. Exceptions may be made and must be approved by the Christian Education committee.

- c) Childcare workers, teachers, and substitutes must be at least fourteen years of age. Those who complete the screening and training and are between the ages of fourteen and eighteen must always serve with an adult. Minimum age for the training is fourteen. Those between the ages of eleven and fourteen can serve as a third helper in a classroom or in childcare with the approval of the Christian Education committee.

2) SUPERVISION / OVERSIGHT

- a) The Christian Education committee, acting on behalf of the congregation, will:
 - i) maintain and uphold Skyridge's child protection policy,
 - ii) periodically review the policy and updating it,
 - iii) choose volunteers to lead the child protection training,
 - iv) schedule at least one training per year,
 - v) encourage all members and attendees ages fourteen and older to participate in the training,
 - vi) screen all volunteers who work with children,
 - vii) provide ongoing monitoring of compliance to the Child Protection policy, of Sunday School teachers and other volunteers working with children,
 - viii) bring the policy to the attention of the congregation in conjunction with Child Protection Sunday, through the newsletter, bulletin, and/or correspondence,
 - ix) maintain a list of those who have completed the child protection screening process, and post a current copy of the list on the child care room door,
 - x) provide a current list to the usher group (to be kept in an agreed-upon location close to the front desk) so that greeters may summon a screened person should a visitor request infant care for their infant for during worship.
- b) Reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that the church carries insurance coverage for child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. Insurance should be reviewed periodically to ensure that appropriate coverage is maintained.
- c) Skyridge cooperates fully with child protection policies of the Church of the Brethren Michigan District and the denomination.

3) TRAINING

- a) All volunteers working with children must complete the child protection training and sign an affidavit agreeing to follow the policies and guidelines explained in the training.
- b) Parents assisting with childcare or who are present with their children in childcare must participate in training as soon as it is possible to arrange. Before training, parents may not have responsibility for caring for children other than their own.
- c) It is desire of the Christian Education committee that all individuals attending Skyridge (age fourteen and older) attend the child protection training for basic education and to understand Skyridge's commitment to child protection.
- d) All those who participate in the child protection training (regardless of whether they wish to work with children in the church) are invited to sign an affidavit agreeing to follow the policies and guidelines explained in the training.

- e) The Christian Education committee will annually inform all who have completed the training of updates and changes in the Skyridge child protection program.
- f) Those who have completed the training may choose at any time to make application to become an approved childcare giver.

4) SCREENING

- a) Potential childcare givers must complete the *Childcare Giver Information Sheet*.
- b) Potential childcare givers must obtain two written references on forms provided by the Christian Education committee. (Note: Church members and attendees may serve as references for each other, excluding family members.) If the Christian Education committee decides they want to contact a reference, written record will be kept of that contact. All files related to applications will be kept in a locked file cabinet with limited access through the Christian Education committee.
- c) Paid childcare givers may be hired only upon the personal recommendation of someone who has been a regular attendee or member of the congregation for at least six months. A potential paid childcare giver must complete the *Childcare Giver Information Sheet*, provide appropriate references, attend the child protection training, and sign an affidavit agreeing to follow the policies and guidelines.
- d) Each applicant will request a background check through the Michigan Department of Human Services (which includes the sexual offender registry) within one month of a completed application being submitted. A form letter will be provided to the applicant by the Christian Education committee, upon request. A copy of the DHS response must be submitted by the applicant to the Christian Education committee and will be kept in the applicant's personal file.
- e) Upon receiving all these materials, the Christian Education committee will make a decision concerning the applicant's desire to be an approved childcare giver for the congregation, and will communicate the decision to the applicant.
- f) All records related to childcare giver applications will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible to the Christian Education committee.

5) CHILDCARE GIVER EXPECTATIONS

- a) Physical contact should be with the child's consent. For example: "May I give you a hug?" It should be limited to hugs and contact with the hand, shoulder or upper back of the child. A child's verbal or non-verbal "no" should always be respected. The exception would be when there is evidence of clear and present danger to the child or others.
- b) Windows of doors to classrooms or childcare areas will remain visible and will not be covered up. If there is no window in the door, the classroom door will remain open.
- c) Skyridge believes in teaching peace and reconciliation through example; corporal punishment is not an option. Verbal interactions should also be polite, respecting the child's right to be in a safe place.
- d) No one may engage in verbal or non-verbal sexual behavior with any child or youth, or in the presence with any child or youth.
- e) Parents are welcome in classrooms and child areas at any time, so long as Sunday School classes are not disrupted.

- f) Sunday morning nursery and childcare givers will have a partner present to help with diapering, toileting, or any need that may arise.
- g) Parents' knowledge and approval must be secured if childcare givers wish to spend time with children or youth outside of the structure of planned activities, or for one-to-one interactions with no second adult in the vicinity.
- h) Our mentoring program requires the youth's consent and the parent's knowledge and approval.
- i) Overnights and field trips need a minimum of two adults for supervision. Exceptions may be made only with the prior knowledge of, and written permission from, the parent. Permission must be given on an activity form (available from the church office).
- j) Should there be suspicion of abuse to a child (from any source), childcare givers will follow appropriate procedures to report such abuse to the authorities.

6) COMMUNITY PRACTICES: WORSHIP, EDUCATION

- a) Skyridge will annually schedule a "Child Protection Sunday" preferably in the spring after Easter to highlight in worship social and theological issues related to this topic, and to remind us of God's call for us to welcome and protect children.
- b) Concurrent with the annual Child Protection Sunday worship service, a letter to the editor / opinion piece will be submitted by the pastor or church leadership to the local newspaper.
- c) At least once every three years, standard curriculum will be suspended for a quarter to allow for children (preschool through high school) to be educated about issues related to child abuse, and the church's role in caring for and protecting children. The Christian Education committee will review and select the curriculum. When appropriate, the committee will also recruit teachers with special training to teach these classes.
- d) Through "Inquirers' Classes" (scheduled periodically to provide information about the Church of the Brethren in general and Skyridge in specific), the pastor will educate newcomers to the congregation about our child protection policy. Information about the policy and our rationale for it will be included in "Welcome Packets" and listed on our website.
- e) At the time that an outside group contracts to regularly use the building, they will be given a copy of the Skyridge Child Protection policy.

7) RESPONDING TO A CONCERN / ALLEGATION

- a) Following state laws and ethical guidelines provided by the denomination, suspected incidents of child abuse will be reported in order to help children be safe.
 - i) The person who has witnessed child abuse, hears a report of child abuse, or suspects child abuse for any reason, should first report it to the pastor.
 - (1) The person who has witnessed an alleged incident needs to follow the church reporting policy, and after reporting to the pastor must submit a written report using the form provided by the church.
 - (2) Copies of all records pertaining to an allegation will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet with limited access through the pastor and board chair.

- (3) The required time for reporting is immediate, or as soon as practically possible. (Department of Human Services/DHS requirement is within 48 hours of the suspected abuse being noted.)
 - (4) Reporting to the pastor should be done immediately by phone, with a written report to follow.
 - (5) This internal reporting is not intended to replace the required state reporting and forms.
- ii) If the pastor is not available, or if the report involves the pastor, the person with a concern should speak to the chair of the Christian Education committee or the board chair, following the same procedure as above. We believe that this helps to protect everyone involved.
 - iii) The concern will be reviewed to determine whether it fits the state child protective services guidelines for reporting (suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected). The person receiving the complaint may choose to consult with a licensed social worker. However, confidentiality must be respected by anyone who is consulted. If there is a conclusion that Child Protective Services needs to be called, it must be done in a way that offers respect and emotional / spiritual support to everyone involved.
 - iv) To report suspected child abuse, a phone call will be made to Department of Human Services, Child Protective Services (CPS, Kalamazoo County, 269/337-5046, 24-hours). A DHS 3200 form must be completed. Reports of suspected abuse need to be made to DHS immediately, by phone, and in writing, within 48 hours of the suspected abuse being noted.
 - v) After a reporting conclusion is reached, a discernment committee is formed to provide accompaniment and healing as is appropriate. This committee will be made up of the pastor, chair of Christian Education committee, and board chair.
- b) The above procedure will be followed whether the alleged incident occurs on church grounds or elsewhere.
 - c) Any person related to the church who is accused of abusing a child must be suspended from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation is completed.
 - i) When child abuse by a paid or volunteer childcare giver is confirmed, the church will immediately dismiss the person who abused the child from his or her position.
 - ii) When the evidence is inconclusive, the church may nonetheless take whatever remedial measures the church deems appropriate.
 - iii) Depending on the strength of the evidence and other relevant considerations, these measures may include dismissing the accused from his or her position.
 - d) If the abuse allegation implicates paid church staff, then Church of the Brethren denominational guidelines outlined in the *Pastoral Ethics Paper* will be followed. This is the responsibility of the church.
 - e) The Christian Education committee, in consultation with the pastor, will develop a plan for support and healing for all those involved in the incident, maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
- 8) ABUSERS ATTENDING CHURCH
- a) Training is provided periodically through the Christian Education committee for support persons who can be available to work with alleged abusers who are interested in

participating in church activities. At any time there will be at least two trained congregational members.

- b) Any person who has knowledge of or questions concerning an alleged abuser (whether previously identified or not) will share such concerns with pastor as soon as possible.
- c) A confidential file will be established, and will be maintained in a locked file cabinet with limited access through the pastor and board chair. Copies of all materials related to this situation will be placed in this file.
- d) The pastor will check the sexual offender registry before proceeding further.
- e) The pastor and one of the trained support persons will meet privately with the alleged abuser as soon as possible:
 - i) The alleged abuser will be told about the child protection policy and the specific concern.
 - ii) If the alleged abuser wishes to continue participation in church activities, s/he will be invited to sign a release to contact any previous sexual offender treatment provider, parole officer, current therapist, and partner, as applicable.
 - iii) The pastor will inform the board chair and Christian Education committee chair confidentially about when the meeting will be taking place, and with whom.
- f) The pastor and/or support person will contact treatment providers to inform that the person desires to continue to participate in church activities and to ask what precautions they recommend the church should take.
- g) The pastor and support person will contact the person's partner in regard to the process, as applicable.
- h) The alleged abuser and his/her partner will be asked to join in a confidential meeting with a group composed of the support person, pastor, and Christian Education committee chair, to discuss the situation and decide next steps.
- i) This group may then decide to require a professional risk assessment as a condition for continuing participation in church activities. (This may be done at any time.)
- j) The alleged abuser is asked to participate in developing and signing a *Covenant of Accountability*.
- k) On at least a quarterly basis this group will come back together to process any questions or concerns in following through with the *Covenant of Accountability*.
- l) While it is desirable to integrate all people who wish to participate in the life of the church, there are reasons for making a decision to exclude a person in this situation who meets any of the following concern criteria:
 - i) refusal for the pastor to contact treatment providers / parole officer etc.
 - ii) refusal to go for a risk assessment if requested.
 - iii) a report or statement from a treatment provider that the individual may put the congregation or the community at risk.
 - iv) discernment by the group that the individual may put the congregation at risk.
 - v) refusal to sign the *Covenant of Accountability*.
 - vi) refusal to comply with the requirements of the *Covenant of Accountability*.
- m) If an alleged abuser who has refused to comply, demonstrates that s/he now complies with these conditions, the process will begin again to reassess the alleged abuser and determine how s/he can be welcomed into the life of the congregation anew.